

disappointing for some of the people who had high hopes for developments sort of taking off. You know, we were still in that period when we talked about countries "taking off" in development, and all that analysis was still being applied to countries like Iran.

Q: Did the CIA have people coming to Tabriz once in a while or was there a CIA person stationed there?

Bolster: Yes, and they did have people coming occasionally, but that was something I just didn't get involved in, because it was arranged with the Consul and I knew who their people were, but it was essentially outside of my particular sphere. Except, of course, when I was in charge and I would be brought aboard about certain things, but, you know, generally I'd stay out of that.

Q: I guess around late 1962, early 1963, the Shah announced his Six Point Reform Program, about land reform and "rights" for women, educational reform and so forth. And I guess there was a national referendum, a plebiscite on the Shah's program?

Bolster: Yes. Right. A plebiscite.

Q: Supposedly ninety-nine per cent of those who voted, like six million people voted for the Shah's program. Did you observe the plebiscite or see it take place?

Bolster: I didn't actually see it take place in the sense of being right there and watching people line up and so on. I did see people in Tabriz voting and we had all kinds of information about how the affair went. They had a program of inking people's finger, their thumb, once they'd voted, so that they would not be able to vote again. I'm sure there couldn't have been ninety-nine per cent of the people who voted.

Q: That's what the books say though.

Bolster: No, I know.

Q: Ninety-nine per cent of those--

Bolster: --of those voting voted in favor.

Q: Yes. Exactly.

Bolster: Well, again, you know, if there'd been a vote on individual items of the reform program, there probably would have been an awful lot of negative votes, as I say, about women suffrage. But when it was a package deal, everyone said, well, this is a whole reform package, what are we going to do? If we vote no, it's going to happen anyway. So everyone just sort of fell in line and figured a) the Shah wants it, so he's probably

going to get it, so we might as well go along, and b) there are some good aspects to it. You know, land reform. If that gives me some land, fine. Literacy corps, if that teaches my kids in the village to read, then I'm all for it. Health corps, if that brings a doctor to my village even once a year, it's better than what I have now. So that would be fine. And Houses of Justice, that sounds like a good idea. We've had these disputes going on for years. If we can get a House of Justice in a nearby village, maybe we can resolve them. You know, there were enough positive aspects, I think, that a lot of people would go along with it just for that reason too. So I think it probably was a general vote in favor, but the percentages obviously were--

Q: Yes, it's amazing, the high turnout. Was there any sort of subtle coercion for people to vote? I guess getting a black mark on your finger-- if you didn't have one, it meant you would not have voted. Was there any sort of implicit sanctions about not participating?

Bolster: Sure. It was the thing to do. And they made sure that people were allowed to vote in their villages or a nearby town. Transportation was arranged. You know, there are all kinds of ways of doing these things. I really don't recall a great deal of specifics about that, but we weren't surprised that there was an overwhelming vote in favor.

Q: Now during the first months of 1963, there was a fair amount of growing anti-Shah activity around the country. From what I've read at least. The Ayatolleh Khomeini was becoming a major figure in the opposition, the national opposition to the Shah, and there was growing clerical criticism of the Shah. Apparently during these months of early '63 there were government attacks on religious schools in Qom, and apparently Tabriz as well, during these months. Did you know much about the attacks on the religious schools? Was that something that was fairly visible in your recollection?

Bolster: Well, it was quite well reported in the press. It was certainly well known. Again it focused largely around the reform program, because for one thing there were many reasons for the clerics to be opposed to land reform too. For one thing, there'd been a nice little symbiotic relationship in most villages between the village mullah and the landlord, because as long as the relationships were good between them, the mullah told the peasants to accede to the will of Allah and be a good citizen and not create a lot of unrest here on earth, because, you know, we must all live with the situations as we find them and we'll find paradise after we die. So let's just all pull together and not raise a lot of fuss. Implicit was this sort of understanding that if the peasants behave themselves, they would be treated reasonably well, and the mullah could intercede in a case of hardship. But the mullah was in turn treated well by the

landlord, looked up to and revered by the peasants and so on. And the mullah taught the only literacy class in the village and he was the only-- in many cases the only literate person in the village. He would teach the kids reading and writing through the Quran.

So there was this relationship, and then once the landlords were deprived of their lands, that upset the situation. In some cases later, lands belonging to the church might be confiscated and distributed among the peasants. Not all, certainly, but some lands were going to be taken from clerical control. Villages that had been, say, deeded by the owner to a mosque or to some religious endowment were going to be affected by land reform, and that was anathema too, because you were taking away some of the support for the church.

Furthermore, there were analytical grounds for being concerned about land reform. The question of whether the possession of one person can be taken away by the government and given to somebody else. You know, it's one thing to say you take the land from the landlord and give it to the peasant who's farming it, but from a theological standpoint, the mullah could argue that ownership of land is sacred and there's no temporal right of the government to come in and take the money from one person and give it to somebody else.

So there were all kinds of reasons why there were doubts by clerical leaders about the reform package. Certain things they wouldn't have opposed. Houses of Justice and things like that

obviously they were in favor of. But then again that women's rights question. Now that really was dangerous. I mean, mullahs just-- you know, they were very tradition-minded. As you know, the mosque is segregated, the men on one side, the women on another. The idea of giving women the vote and any role in affairs was just anathema to the clerical leaders. So Khomeini and others engaged in a lot of ferment behind the scenes, in telling people that they shouldn't sit by while the government rammed these reforms down their throats.

And, of course, that culminated in the June '63 riots in Tehran, which again I only heard about indirectly. One, obviously the press reports, but two, I was down in Tehran just days after it happened and met with some of the junior officers just socially, and they were describing some of the scenes as just really wanton brutality. I mean, on both sides. Telephone kiosks being destroyed and traffic lights smashed. And any symbol of authority-- banks, buses, whatever-- was attacked by mobs, and then, of course, the government reacted with overwhelming force and there were lots of people killed. And, of course, there were then the official reports of death and then there were the unofficial rumors of much, much higher casualties. And so it was a real time of concern.

We did have unrest in Tabriz too.

---

Q: I've read that, yes. Did you witness any of the demonstrations there?

Bolster: I was not in the midst of them, but one day when we expected demonstrations, we made a quick foray around town just to see what we could see, and there were troops everywhere and all kinds of control. What they did, as I recall--it was quite clever-- they had troops lined up in the bazaar area, which was, of course, a hotbed of activity, because the clerics were very strong in the bazaar, a lot of links there. And so the government said, you must open the shops. The merchants were going to keep them closed as a protest. It was something like you're having now in Palestine. Open, Close, Open, Close. The poor merchant's in the middle. "What am I going to do? The government says open up and then the mob's going to come in and destroy my place."

So the government had their troops lined up and they would have one group in the foreground kneeling, aiming their guns at the mob, and then another group standing behind with their guns aimed in the air, and then on a signal there would be a volley of shots. And, of course, the crowd didn't know whether it was the guys aiming here or the guys aiming here who were going to actually shoot, and, of course, the guys aiming in the air were the ones that pulled the triggers, so you just had all these shots going into the air. But it was very effective in showing the rioters that the government was prepared to do what they could to keep control.

So, as I witnessed the situation, the government in Tabriz

kept the lid on very tightly and avoided the kind of casualties that they had in Tehran. But it was dicey.

Q: How much concern was there among U.S. officials after Tehran that political repression of that scale might really be counter-productive in terms of the Shah's position in the country? Was there much concern in that angle?

Bolster: Well, there was concern, I think, that events would get out of hand, that because the government had reacted so strongly to the protests that there might be a whole cycle of further violence by a mob and then further repression, and, you know, the whole thing could just snowball. But the result was that the situation did calm down. And, of course, eventually the Khomeini was expelled and went off to Iraq and continued.

Now one other period that I think is very important to keep in mind is the issue of capitulation, which came up, the Status of Forces agreement that we were trying to get the alliance to agree to, so that when military people were assigned in Iran, they would have some rights in case of accidents or whatever. You know, they'd be treated in some way that would be defensible to the folks back home and yet would not be offensive to Iranians. It was very tough, because in the Middle East there was this tradition of capitulations and special treatment for foreigners, and the Iranians were very sensitive to that and the mullahs were very adept at bringing up the parallel between

capitulations and the Status of Forces agreement. And the majlis, in a very unusual development, kicked up its heels and barely approved this. It was very close. And there were fiery speeches. You know, "We won't accept this kind of pressure from the U.S." And Mansur was just taken aback, because he was trying to hold things under control and show the Shah that he was managing the situation. I went to some of the majlis debates and heard people taking their positions, and it was amazing to see this allegedly rubber-stamp Parliament kick up its heels and take a different view.

Q: So you people were really surprised by what happened, I take it?

Bolster: We were surprised by the vociferousness of the opposition point of view in the Parliament, yes, and the degree to which this became a popular issue, in that they all sort of fit into the same kind of chaos that was going on in that general time.

Q: This was in 1964, right?

Bolster: Yes, this was in 1964, but, you know, we were very mindful of what happened in 1963. Gee, if people are this upset about it, maybe there's a ferment beneath the scenes that we're just beginning to see again. So there was a lot of concern about

that.

Q: I see a report by General Eckhardt, who was the Armish-MAAG Chief during the mid-sixties, and he noted the strong connection between the mullahs and political dissidents generally among the middle classes, the bazaris and so forth. And he observed in this report-- it's sort of interesting-- that the mullahs were the opposition group with the greatest ability to lead an uprising against the Shah. To what extent did other U.S. officials during this period share this estimate of leadership ability of the mullahs in terms of leading an uprising, a revolution, at some point?

Bolster: I think the Embassy was fairly well aware of that general proclivity, because-- particularly-- I mean, I can speak from experience that I was the political officer in charge of-- if you will, if you can use that expression-- contact with the opposition and reporting on what the opposition was doing. I had various National Front contacts and other people, including Shapour Bakhtiar. You know, various people, either directly or through contacts of theirs. There are some people that maintained contacts with the Embassy over the years.

One is Hedayatollah Matin-Daftari, which was a grandson of Mossadegh. And Matin- Daftari was a lawyer and very clearly a National Front person, because of his relationship to Mossadegh, and he was occasionally questioned or thrown in jail by the

regime over the years.

But, you know, through all these various people I was trying to keep just an idea of what the opposition was doing and report on all the significant aspects of opposition. And one question was always, well, how much are the religious people involved in this? And so through various questions I got an introduction to an Ayatollah Qotsi, who was suggested to me as a contact, because he was a person who was fairly high up in the religious hierarchy, but not so high that he couldn't talk to a foreigner. He was understanding and really wanted to learn more about our position on things, as well as tell us about religious people's views.

So I used to periodically meet with him. I'd just go over to his house and sit around on cushions on the floor and talk about what was going on. And it was very informative. You know, I always wrote up everything I learned about him. I don't know anything about him any more, whether he's still around or whatever. You may be aware of some things that have come out in the Iranian press, were purported to be U.S. documents that were seized in the Embassy?

Q: Oh, the captured ("Nest of Spies") documents? Right.

Bolster: Well, there's one there, which I have a copy of somewhere, which purports to be a memorandum that I wrote about my various contacts. We can go into it later. And anyway, Qotsi

is listed there. So I don't know what happened to people who were identified openly as contacts with the American Embassy. Obviously in the society like that, where no one trusts the press, everything is based on who knows what and there are rumors and gossip and I know So-and-So who said this happened and is that true? And you find out somebody else's view, and it's such a great rumor-mongering society, with people valuing their contacts based on how much they really know. Really with a fairly small number of phone calls or personal visits, people could find out a tremendous amount of information from people who were in the know.

There was a system of *dohres*, or groups, that's been written about by Binder and other analysts about how information was transmitted in Iranian society, and if you were in the right *dohre*, you would have contacts with a lot of other people in various walks of life, and among that group that met periodically, you could find out anything that was going on really. And that's how people depended for their factual information, was on the contacts they had with various people. The press was just something to look at and snicker about, because you could see something in the press and then you'd find out the real story from your friends and evaluate why the government said this, when, in fact, the truth is this.

Anyway, I was saying that Qotsi was this very good contact, to give me some ideas of clerical views about Iran. And he kept harking back to our support for the Shah. This was looked upon

by Iranians as immoral. You know, you're supporting a man who has no appreciation of our background, because he's not a religious man. He doesn't pay enough attention to religion. He's spending all his money on arms. He should be spending money on education and food for children and, you know, all the things that are needed in this country of ours, but he's spending it on arms and wasting our oil revenues. We had many discussions along this line.

And I think that was instructive. I always wrote up these conversations and I felt that the religious angle should always be carefully explored. Even Herz [Martin] had some contacts with people who had contacts with noted clergymen, and the Embassy in general I think was attuned from the top to bottom to the importance of religion.

Unfortunately, when I came back in 1975 I felt that there was not nearly the same attention given to the effect of religion on politics, and in a session once at the Embassy I even recommended that we start cultivating religious figures again, to find out just what they were thinking about issues. I cited the importance of religion in their lives, as I saw it even from my home up in northern Tehran and gave some examples. But they would say, well, let's think about it. But by that time we, I think, had evolved into this position where we just didn't do anything that might upset the Shah, and so the pros and cons of finding out about religious sentiment were considered to be-- you know, the pros were considered to be inadequate in view of the

cons that might result from the Shah being angry if we were in touch with the mullahs. So we just didn't do it.

Q: You mentioned one thing earlier about--was it widely assumed among the educated, literate people at this time, the early sixties, that the U.S. had, in fact, played a major role in bringing the Shah back in 1953? That was the assumption?

Bolster: Oh, that was dogma. Everybody you talked to just cited that as gospel truth. At the time we fuzzed the issue. We kept saying, you know-- if anyone asked us, we would say there were allegations that this had happened or something. We never said it openly, but then later, of course, Kim Roosevelt's book came out and [Richard] Cottam's book came out and, you know, a lot of open discussion of it. But when I first came there, it was still a sort of taboo subject, but every Iranian you talked to--

Q: At the Embassy?

Bolster: Yes. Well, I mean, when you as an Embassy person met an Iranian, you never brought it up, but the Iranians just right away said, well, "Of course you Americans put him on the throne, so, you know-- you put him on the throne, why can't you tell him what to do? If he's not doing thus and so and thus and so, well, why don't you tell him to do it? You guys put him on-- if it weren't for you, he wouldn't be in power."

So when you said, "Well, Iran is a sovereign country, we can't tell sovereign countries what to do. We can influence them somewhat, but we can't just order them around. I mean, this is your country, it's a sovereign--" they replied: "Oh, come on. You guys put him in power. You can tell him to do anything."

Because they have a view just like-- everything's a puppet, you know, and who's pulling the strings? It's the Americans, the British, the Soviets. They had this expression, "Dast-e Kharegi," the foreign hand. That "Dasth-e Kharegi," is everywhere. Everyone was analyzed in terms of where he got support. Is he pro-British, pro-American, pro-Soviet, or some other country? Everybody was analyzed that way. That was one of the lexicons of Persian political thought.

There are all kinds of details I shouldn't get into, because there are many side issues, but books like Binder's book about political systems, he has a whole long chapter about Iran and how it works. Then later on you have that book based on interviews with Iranians by Marvin Zonis. I knew Marvin when he was out there and he was very energetic in having the Iranians fill out these questionnaires that he had, and then he analyzed the data and wrote this long book about it.

So there were all kinds of people out there. I met James Bill out there just before I left in '66. I met him when he was out there doing some of his first research.

So a lot of people were analyzing Iran. A lot of ferment of ideas and so on. Over the years it's been a subject of great

interest to a lot of people studying politics and international development.

Q: Going back, you became a Political Officer at the Embassy in late 1963?

Bolster: Yes.

Q: How did that come about? Just a natural progression of things?

Bolster: Well, it was a natural progression because I'd been through the language and area training, and so I knew that obviously a good part of my career would be tied up with Farsi speaking countries. And so when I finished in Tabriz, it was widely assumed that either that next assignment or another one would be in Iran. So I was willing to go to the capital for a next assignment. I felt, having been in the provinces, it was quite a natural progression to then come to the center and it gave me a good grounding.

[TAPE INTERRUPTION]

Bolster: Well, we had quite a large Political Section in those days, and because we did, we were allowed to then somewhat specialize within the section. So some people dealt more with external political relations. I opted to do something more on

the domestic side, because I'd been in Tabriz, I had the language. Of course, language capability was quite general in those days. We had a lot of people on our staff who spoke good Farsi. People I still work with and can converse with in Farsi and we meet.

But I expressed an interest in continuing to report on the reform program and also to follow the opposition. And that was agreed to and so that was more or less my assignment, my assigned area within the Political Section.

Q: So you did that pretty much for the following three years that you were in Tehran?

Bolster: Yes. Well, except-- no, let me back up now. I did have-- through some complicated maneuvering behind the scenes, I did have a period of time when I had to serve in the Consular Section. Obviously every red-blooded FSO wanted to serve in the Political Section, or if not there, then in the Economic Section, and often times work in the Consular Section was considered to be much less desirable. One, because of the tremendous pressure involved. There were just hundreds and hundreds of applicants lining up every day and you're supposed to apply rules that are rather hard to apply in practice, and find out who was really a bona fide non-immigrant and who was just trying to get to the States to end up living there and getting a job and living the good life.

Anyway, because of certain trades back and forth, I was first put into the Consular Section on non-immigrant visa work and then to citizenship and passport work. So really for the first half year, the first six months of my assignment, I was doing that.

Q: Late 1963, early 1964?

Bolster: Yes. And then I went into the Political Section and did the duties that I just mentioned. So essentially for the next two years or so, that's why the assignment was really sort of two and a half years, because I came right after Kennedy's assassination and then served till the summer of 1966, before I came back to the States.

Q: You talked a bit about Julius Holmes. Who were some of the other officials at the Embassy when you were working there in 1963-1964, the following years? The major people, I guess.

Bolster: Holmes was replaced by Armin Meyer, and right away the fact that analyses bubbled up from the bottom, that began to change, because Meyer had come from Beirut, felt that he knew the Middle East well from his service there, and he took to writing a lot of his own reports to Washington. There were just parts left blank for us to fill in or where our views were solicited, but he basically had all laid out what he was going to

say. And I think this was a frustrating time for everyone in the Political Section, because the transition from Holmes to him, to Armin Meyer, was quite drastic. You know, we felt that Iran was considerably different from the Levant and we thought that he needed more time to understand this new situation before he turned to analyzing the whole thing for Washington's benefit.

But he had his own view and I think-- as I said before, I think too that his talks with the Shah, he got off on a foot where he pretty much became a channel for everything that the Shah wanted to complain about or have set right. And everything was dutifully reported to Washington, as if the measure of his effectiveness was to get done the things that the Shah wanted done in Washington.

So I think, as I said, that ushered in a sequence of people who more or less played that same role. So the Shah got the impression that he could manipulate Washington's views through the approach that he took to the American Ambassador in Tehran.

Q: Who were some of the other people that when Holmes was there that you worked with in the Embassy? I mean, who did you report to, for example? Who was the Chief of the Political Section?

Bolster: Martin Herz.

Q: Oh, Martin Herz was still there?

Bolster: Yes. Because by the time I got into the section, he was firmly ensconced as the head of the Political Section. He had come, as I say, in the fall. No, early fall or late summer of '63, because I'd first met him when I was still in Tabriz. In fact, I remember one of my last analytical pieces that I did in Tabriz was a piece on attitudes toward the reform program, which he was soliciting from various posts. You know, to brief him in his new job as the Political Counselor.

Harry Schwartz, I think, was the predecessor, who I, of course, knew, but I didn't interact with him a great deal. And then, so, as I say, we had Hertz heading the Political Section. Dan Newberry for a while was under him, but then Newberry got transferred and Bill Helseth came in as the Deputy Political Counselor.

And then there was a whole group of people in the section. Victor Wolf, Tom Green, Lloyd Dewitt and Charles Rassias.

Q: Was Bill Miller in the section then?

Bolster: Yes. Myself. Miller--

[END OF TAPE]